DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION MEMORANDUM

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ALAN STOESSEL HAS SEEN

JUL 17 1981

JUL 13 1981

To: S - Mr. Walter J. Stoessel Jr.

From: OES - James L. Malo

Subject: Suggestion that U.S. Technical Team visit Baghdad

In a June 15, 1981 letter to you (tab 2), Dr. Richard Wilson of Harvard University suggested that a technical team of U.S. nuclear experts visit Baghdad to review IAEA safeguards with the Iraqis. It is our view that such a trip would not contribute to overall resolution of the current situation.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the suggested letter to Dr. Wilson (tab 1).

Attachments:

Tab 1 - Suggested letter to Dr. Wilson
Tab 2 - Incoming letter from Dr. Wilson

Drafted: OES/NPE D.Ujifusa

Clearances: OES/N J.F.Enright
EUR/RPE W.Barmon
EUR/RPE M.Wimmer
M R.Stratford

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

COPIES TO:

July 18, 1981

Dear Mr. Howard:

Thank you for your recent letter concerning the telephone conversation between Miss Edwards and the Department's press duty officer on the night of June 7. I regret that a misunderstanding has arisen and am pleased to have this opportunity to respond.

Let me state from the outset that it is not the policy of this Department to mislead or deceive members of the press. As CBS News knows from experience, our press officers make a consistent effort to be as candid and helpful as possible in responding to press inquiries. I understand that the duty officer who spoke with Miss Edwards that evening does not recall having denied knowledge of the Israeli raid. He does, however, recall having refused to comment on the subject as he was instructed to do. I do not believe that this could be interpreted as dissembling.

I appreciate your taking the time to bring the matter to my attention, and I look forward to a continued amicable relationship between CBS and this Department.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

Mr. Bill Leonard
President, CBS News
524 West 57 Street
New York, New York

NEWS
A Division of CBS Inc.
524 West 57 Street
New York, New York 10019
(212) 975-2986
Bill Leonard, President

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I hesitate to bring to your attention a matter that at first blush might seem comparatively trivial, but it does go directly to the underpinnings that should and generally have existed between your agency and this news organization.

The case at hand is a telephone call made to the Department of State's public information duty officer on Sunday, June 7, at about 11:30 PM. The call was placed by CBS News Washington Bureau desk editor Anne Edwards who was trying to check out a tip that the Begin government had informed the United States Ambassador to Israel that the Israelis had bombed a nuclear power plant south of Baghdad. Your spokesman's response was "I don't know anything about it and I wouldn't tell you if I did". Miss Edwards asked, "Do you know something you're not telling me?". The reply was "I don't know anything about it", and there the conversation ended.

Miss Edwards knew from experience that if indeed an event of this magnitude had taken place, the State Department would be well aware of it.

Years of exchanges, in situations similar to this between CBS News reporters and State Department people, had reinforced our understanding that whereas no information might be forthcoming from your people under some circumstances, deliberate deception or dissembling was not a part of your policy in dealing with the press. Therefore, in this case, the State Department's official reaction to Miss Edwards' inquiry carried with it the strong inference that the event had not indeed occurred.

As this is written, we know, of course, that the attack did take place and we are further aware that your spokesman was aware of the attack at the time when he denied to Miss Edwards any knowledge of it.

Mr. Secretary, I think it is worth reemphasizing that over the years there has been a sturdy working relationship between the Department of State and CBS News. Naturally we hope that relationship will survive and endure, and therefore I am shaken when a case of official dissembling threatens the foundations of that relationship. I hope you may be able to reassure me that the policy of the Department of State has not changed and that the news media, specifically including CBS News, may expect its queries to be handled as forthrightly and as lacking in deception in the future as they generally have been in the past. In other words, that this incident was an aberration.

With warm personal regards,

Sincerely,

The Honorable
Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
The Secretary of State
The Department of State
2201 C Street
Washington, D.C. 20520

June 22, 1981

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION MEMORANDUM

S120871

July 10, 1981

TO: The Secretary

FROM: PA - Dean Fischer, Designate

SUBJECT: Reply to letter from CBS News for your signature

CBS News president Bill Leonard has written you to object to a press duty officer's response to CBS inquiry about the Israeli attack on the Iraqi nuclear plant the night of June 7.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the attached letter to Mr. Leonard.

Attachments:

Tab 1 - Letter to Mr. Leonard
Tab 2 - Letter from Mr. Leonard

Drafted:S/PRS
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